

ASPECTS OF CASTE SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU DURING THE IMPERIAL COLA TIMES

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Tamil literature of the Imperial Cola times (846-1279 A.D.) yields sufficient material, bearing upon the varied communal groups which may be compared with similar names from inscriptions. The published inscriptions of the Cola period give the names of the following castes.¹

<i>Serial Number</i>	<i>Caste</i>
1.	Vellala
2.	Brahmana
3.	Kaikkola
4.	Cetti
5.	Manrati
6.	Itaiya
7.	Kuyava
8.	Palli
9.	Paraiya
10.	Kammala
11.	Taccan
12.	Tattan
13.	Vetko
14.	Kutirai-cetti
15.	Cankarappati
16.	Valanciya
17.	Caliya
18.	Savarna

19.	Srutiman
20.	Vacciyan
21.	Ila-canran
22.	Manikkiramam
23.	Vettuvan
24.	Kallan
25.	Pattinavan
26.	Tiraiya
27.	Valaiya
28.	Ilamakan
29.	Tanma-vaniya
30.	Conakan
31.	Navitan

In *Pinkala Nikantu*, there is a section on kinds of people ('Atavar Vakai').² There a list of castes and occupational groups is given without any clear distinction. The list is given below :

<i>Caste</i>		<i>Number of Synonyms</i>
Parppar		18
Aracar		17
Vaiciyar	{ Kovaiciyar 3	5
	{ Tanavaiciyar 4	
	{ Puvaiciyar 5	
Cuttirar		13
Kuru		16
Accariyan		4
Ayulvetiyar		3
Kuyavar		3
Uppu vanikar		3
Katikaimakkal		3
Kammalar		5
Kollar		3
Taccar		2
Tattar		4
Kannar		2
Cirpaciriyar		2

Narappukkaruviyalar	1
Torkaruviyalar	1
Mileccar	1
Conakar	1
Cittirakarar	1
Muttamkoppar	4
Vannar	4
Navitan	5
Cekkan	2
Canku aruppor	1
Mikaman	3
Attu vanikan	1
Un vilainar	1
Tol vilainar	1
Uraikarar	1
Tunnar	2
Kal vilainar	3
Cantalar	5
Panar	5
Pantolir Kilmakkal	2
Panmakal	5
Terppakan	3
Yanaippakar	2
Parimalatippor	1
Mataiyar	4
Orrar	3
Kuttar	7
Natakak Kanikai	2
Tamilk kuttar	1
Kalaik kuttar	1
Veriyattalan	4
Tevaratti	3

The *Tivakaram*⁸ which precedes *Pinkala Nikantu* gives the following items in the second Chapter on "makkat tokuti".

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Number of Synonyme</i>
Aruntavar	21
Parppar	20
Aracan	18
Cettikal	12
Karalar	11
Kaikkolar	4
Maruttuvar	4
Kuyavar	4
Uppamaippor (Umanar)	2
Cittirakkarak	1
Kammalar	10
Taccar	2
Kannar	2
Tattar	2
Vannar	4
Uraikarak	1
Tolvinainar	1
Unvilainar	1
Mavitar	2
Cekkar	2
Kalvilainar	3
Mileccar	1
Conakar	1
Cantalar	7
Panar	7
Patarkilmakkal	2
Tamilkkuttar	1
Kalaiikkuttar	1
Torkaruivivicaippor	1
Narappukkaruvi kolar kuriyor	1
Tolilceyvor	1
Putiyor	2
Mikaman	2
Ayalor	2
Valiccelvor	1

Atimai	2
Mataiyar	2
Evalceyvor	7
Orrar	2
Veriyattalar	4

From *Periya Puranam* the respective castes of the sixty three nayanmars are understood and the frequency of these are as below :

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Velalar	13
Antanar	12
Aracar	11
Vanikar	5
Aticaivar	4
Itaiyar	2
Caliyar	1
Canror	1
Cekkar	1
Ekaliyar	1
Kuyavar	1
Mammttirar	1
Nulaiyar	1
Panar	1
Pulaiyar	1
Vetar	1
Not known	5

Analysis of these different lists may be attempted here. *Tivakaram*, before giving the names of occupational groups, speaks of *tapasine*, probably suggesting that they are on par with Brahmins. Then it enumerates the names of teachers and poets. Next it gives the name of elders, greatmen, the overlord, and the various families of kings. Probably they are closer to the king. The names of ministers, allies, administrators, commanders-in-chief, etc. are given next. All these people belong to the king's group. Next it gives twelve synonyms of Cetti. The term *Vaisya* is included therein and so it may be that all these twelve belong to the Vaisya

(caste). Next follows the term *Karalar* for which eleven synonyms are given. *Sudra* also occurs thereby suggesting that they belong to the latter. But it is significant that the author does not mention prominently the *Vaisyas* and *Sudras* but puts them under *Cettikal* and *Karalar*. We get thereafter a number of occupational groups. Later in Chapter XII, it defines '*anuloma*' and '*piratiloma*' as the descendants of intercaste marriages and thereafter the *Antaralar* and *Virattivar*, the descendants of the *anulomar* and *Piratilomar*. From the details it may be noted that though the author of *Tivakaram* is familiar with the Varna classification he does not attempt to follow it completely.

He uses the names of four Varnas imprecisely. This may be due to the fact that he is closer in point of time to the Cankam period and the ideas of rigid classification have not yet taken roots.

Pinkala Nikantu belonging to the X century definitely follows the Varna theory. The difference between these two *nikantus* gives the key for reconstructing the social history of the Age. *Pinkalam* does not bring in the elders, the great men, ministers, commanders and teachers while enumerating the synonyms of Brahmin. These names are dealt with after dealing with the names of varnas and occupational groups. He uses the four terms "Parppar, Aracar, Vaiciyar and Cuttivar". But there is here also a confusion which it cannot avoid because of the difficulty in equating the Tamil occupational groups with the four varnas. In the case of the Vaisyas he states that they protect the cow, amass wealth and cultivate lands. Therefore, he speaks of "Kovaiciyar, tanavaiciyar and Puvaiciyar". Here is therefore a development from *Tivakaram*. The term 'Karalar' and 'Ulavar' in addition to Velalar are put in the category of Vaisyas as well as that of the Sudras. It is surprising that *Pinkala Nikantu* should bring in the 'guru' (Kuru) after the Sudras but before mentioning Acharya (accariyan). Four equivalent terms are given; *Ooan*, *Panikkan*, *Unatti* and *Tecikan*. These terms may probably refer to non-brahmin priests. *Pinkalam* omits the *kaikolar*. "*Katikaimakkal*" is brought under the occupational groups after salt merchants whereas *Tivakaram* describes them under *potes*, etc. '*Cittirakarar*' comes immediately after "up-

pamaippor" in *Tivakaram* whereas *Pinkalam* relegates them to a later position. Kammalars have larger number of synonyms in *Tivakaram*. People who are connected with the mint are brought under 'Kammalar' in *Tivakaram*. *Kammalars* have very high sounding terms like 'vittiyar', 'punaivar', 'arivar', etc. *Vannar* are relegated to a much lower position in *Pinkalam*.

On one point there is a complete agreement between the different lists. That is that Brahmin, Vellala, aracar and vanikar were the important sections. Another point of agreement is that all the listed names were occupational groups. Each occupation had its own necessity and significance.

Literature of this period repeatedly emphasises equality of all and condemns the caste hierarchy. This only shows the growing nature of caste hierarchy. This seems to be supported by the above lists. As may be seen in the 'Nikantu' lists there is a definite order in the mention of the names of various groups-some being allotted the first places always, some middle places and others further below. Brahmans, rulers (kings), merchants and Vellalar are given the first places. Then come the very essential artisan communities of weavers (kaikolas), artists, architects, smiths and carpenters. All the other professional groups, viz. leather and string instrumentalists, barbers, washermen, dancers, etc., are given next. Strangely the *paraiya* is not mentioned in both of the lists. Perhaps the term is included in "leather instrumentalists". The cantala and pana are assigned to this group but not a lowly position.

When compared to the number of items found in *Tivakaram*, the number in *Pinkalam*, a later work, seems to increase. This may reflect the tendency of branching out of castes. The lists also reveal the attempt of classifying communities on the basis of the Varna model. That this was not an easy process may be inferred from the way the Vellala (land-owning agriculturist) is put under both the *Vaisya* and the *Sudra*.

The frequency list of the castes of the Saivaite saints of the *Perivapurānam* would support the prominence of the first group, the Brahmins, the Vellala, the kings and the merchants. This shows that in spite of the democratic nature of the Bhakti school the

leaders of this religion were mostly from the upper strata of the society. This is still more clearly seen in the case of Vaishnavite religion. It may be therefore suggested that these movements were mainly *elitist* ones. An important reason for this may be that these movements were mainly nourished by the orthodox Vedic tradition.

REFERENCES

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2. *Pinkala Nikantu* "Atavar Vakai".
3. *Centan Tivakavam* "Mukkat peyart tokuti".